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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000394

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: A/S WELCH AND JORDANIAN FM DISCUSS ANNAPOLIS
PROCESS, GAZA, MAGHRABI GATE

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: On February 5, NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch met with Salaheddin Al-Bashir, Jordan's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Speaking about the ongoing Annapolis process, Bashir and Welch agreed that regional conferences could help create more positive atmospherics to keep momentum going. Bashir brought up concerns about settlement activity derailing the process, and Welch responded that President Bush's statements against settlements are clear. On Gaza, Bashir postulated that Hamas was demonstrating its negative impact on the lives of the people, and that eliminating support for Hamas was the only path towards a solution. Bashir indicated increasing concern on the issue of the Maghrabi Gate, and detailed a technical-level impasse that should be resolved on the political level before it gets out of hand. Bashir was not hopeful on progress in Lebanon, but nevertheless saw an Arab consensus emerging soon. End Summary.

Moving Forward Regionally on Annapolis

[¶2.](#) (C) Bashir started the meeting by saying that there were "a lot of positives" out of the Annapolis process and the President's January visit to the region. Looking ahead to the upcoming summits of the Organization of the Islamic Conferences (OIC) and the Arab League, Bashir was optimistic that the "balanced statements" from both organizations would continue. Still, Bashir said that actors in the region were watching the progress of negotiations, and were "not willing to go the extra mile without clarity on the ground" as to how the situation was unfolding.

[¶3.](#) (C) Welch told Bashir that these meetings will be important atmospheric indicators and markers on how the political track is progressing. While negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are by agreement not publicized, there are positive atmospherics from those talks that need to be reinforced - something that can be accomplished through the statements of the OIC and Arab League summits. In particular, Jordan is in a prime position to start the process of expanding Israeli contact with the Arab world - it has diplomatic relations with Israel, and can use that as a springboard to bring other moderate Arab states into the fold. Bashir asked whether indirect contacts through support for West Bank economic development projects, or more far reaching steps if Israeli forces redeployed to September 2000 lines in accordance with the roadmap, should be reconsidered. Welch felt that more conditioned steps were needed.

Concerns About Settlements

[¶4.](#) (C) Bashir brought up Jordanian concerns about continuing settlement activity in the midst of negotiations, saying that "Israel is not paying enough deference" to the process that

is underway. "We cannot have the Annapolis process continue while some tolerate settlements and others tolerate violence," he stated. In particular, Bashir indicated that further clarity was needed in public statements on all sides about the illegal nature of settlements, regardless of whether they were in Jerusalem or not. Jordan worries that Israeli actions are changing the facts on the ground; the strength of the Annapolis process is that it would not allow such things to happen. Bashir called for a firmer line on settlements that would not tolerate future actions that would prejudice negotiations.

15. (C) Welch responded by reminding Bashir that disturbances in the process can be expected, but that the substance of negotiations is still on track. Focusing on the positive aspects of how to move forward will help to create momentum for the process with the people of the region. Welch noted that President Bush indicated his opposition to settlements, although those in the Jerusalem area will remain a separate topic of negotiation. This stance is not a green light for any kind of settlement activity, but merely a recognition that the topic of Jerusalem must be dealt with separately. The USG has pushed the Olmert government to take action on settlements, and there is hope that some initial moves against illegal outpost settlements will be the first step in a larger procedure that will prepare the Israeli public for further compromise.

Gaza

16. (C) Concerned about developments in Gaza, Bashir commented that the recent statement by the OIC was the result of a meeting called by the Iranians in which a Palestinian

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Authority-written draft was adopted without debate. He called Hamas "the ultimate loser" in the current border standoff, theorizing that the chaotic nature of the border opening showed Gazans that only a peaceful, negotiated solution could stave off periodic crises such as this and put an end to the instability that causes suffering. He felt Palestinian PM Fayyad's proposal to restore PA responsibility for the crossings would, if acted on, help shape public opinion for the PA against Hamas. Still, there is no military solution in Gaza, and Hamas is unlikely to accept a political solution. Therefore, the only way to inch towards progress is to end support for Hamas - "we can't eradicate the last ones who will kill, but we can eradicate the last ones who will support violence."

Maghrabi Gate

17. (C) Bashir expressed growing concern over the Maghrabi Gate issue in Jordan. Calling it a "bomb that will soon explode," he outlined the problems Jordan was experiencing in terms of plans to renovate the gate. Jordanian architectural plans (which Bashir indicated complied with UNESCO standards) are designed to effectively maintain the status quo. In the meantime, Israel has come up with plans of its own that alter the character of the gate. The two plans are proceeding on separate tracks - the Jordanian plans through UNESCO, and the Israeli plans through a local zoning commission. While technical talks on this issue are ongoing between Israel and Jordan, this needs to be resolved through a political discussion.

Lebanon

18. (C) On Lebanon, Bashir indicated that the momentum achieved in statements and rhetoric is starting to peter out, and will need to be reinforced with movement on the ground soon. Saying that he was "not optimistic" on the possibility of Amr Moussa visiting Beirut on Friday, Bashir saw the

collective Arab position on Lebanon solidifying in the coming weeks.

19. (U) A/S Welch cleared this message.

HALE